

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
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1980 CAMPAIGN
BOOK

BRINKLEY: Now about the briefing book, that document made for Carter to use in the 1980 presidential debate, but then somehow fell into the hands of the Reagan people, either leaked to them, or stolen, or something. Here's Sam Donaldson at the White House.

DONALDSON: President Reagan spoke out on the case of the Carter briefing papers for the first time today. REAGAN: I think there's much ado about nothing. The letters have gone out in explanation, that... I myself would like to get at the bottom of it. I had no knowledge of any such thing, and frankly I don't think there ever was a briefing book, as such.

DONALDSON: The president said he'd like to get at the bottom of it, but apparently has made no attempt to do so. Deputy press secretary Larry Speakes said Mr. Reagan has not ordered a staff investigation and has not asked anyone any questions about the matter. Speakes said the president does want anyone who has knowledge of the matter to step forward with the information. One of those who knew at the time the Reagan camp had Carter material was Miles *Martele, an outside consultant hired to coach Mr. Reagan for the debate. *Martele told Joe Benton today he was informed two days before the debate that material from the Carter camp was on hand. *MARTELE: I asked about the importance of the materials and was immediately told that they were not significant. But at the same time, I was disappointed that we had those in our possession and, and suggested that they be returned to the Carter campaign. BENTON: Why return them? MARTELE: Because I didn't think that we should have them. I felt that it was a violation of fair play.

DONALDSON: The material was not returned but Reagan officials have not been able to locate it now. CIA Director William Casey, then campaign manager, can't recall ever having seen it, although White House Chief of Staff James Baker said Casey gave it to him. The president said today he doesn't find it strange people can't remember such things. REAGAN: Look, ask me what paperwork came to my desk last week and I couldn't tell you.

DONALDSON: White House officials complain that the Democrats are working hard to stir up this issue for political purposes. The Democrats are clearly enjoying the administration's discomfort. But until the mystery is solved, the issue will remain for stirring up, and the administration's discomfort can only grow. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.